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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Iran Lebanon - UNIFIL - Israel's
War Against Hezbollah Katrina - One Year Later
PARIS - Monday, August 28, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Iran
Lebanon - UNIFIL - Israel's War Against Hezbollah
Katrina - One Year Later

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

Former Socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin is prominently featured on today's front pages, in reports on the Socialists' summer university in La Rochelle over the weekend, where according to Le Figaro, "The Anti-Royal Front is Gaining Momentum." For Liberation, Jospin is playing up to the "anti-Royals" as he tries a "comeback." For La Croix, "The Socialist Party Offers a Plethora of Choices." Le Journal du Dimanche depicts Jospin as "close to tears" as he explained his withdrawal from politics after his defeat on April 21, 2002. Commentaries are also overwhelmingly devoted to the

Socialists' potential choices, including a "duel" between Segolene Royal and Jospin. In Le Figaro, the editorial is entitled "Anybody, But Not Segolene." Also in domestic news, Le Journal du Dimanche publishes the result of its latest poll which shows that President Chirac is down two points to 36% of satisfied respondents, while PM Villepin gains four points up to 32%.

Iran dominates international stories. Le Figaro says it is caught between "provocation and negotiations." (See Part C) In an interview in Le Figaro, President Ahmadinejad's senior advisor Mojtab Rahmandoust says: "Tehran has no plans to attack Israel. But if Israel attacks us, we will respond... Israel is America's bombardier scout... and encouraging the Palestinians to resist means reducing the chances for a regional invasion by the U.S."

Weekend La Croix dedicates three highly critical pages to "'The Greater Middle East': The American Debacle." Bylines proclaim: "Three years after President Bush' engagement to promote democracy in this region of the world, extremists have imposed themselves;" "Many Christians have preferred to close shop and move;" and "The emergence of a Shi'a alliance threatens the stability of numerous countries." The main article qualifies the U.S. push for a Greater Middle East as another "leitmotif of American strategic thought after or with the 'war on terrorism' or 'regime change.'" After enumerating the free elections in Middle Eastern countries, La Croix says, "Each time, George W. Bush congratulated himself, affirming loud and strong that democracy is progressing. In English, one calls that 'wishful thinking.'"

Le Figaro also analyzes the outcome of Israel's war with Lebanon. For senior analyst Renaud Girard "Israel has wasted a historic opportunity to win the war against Hezbollah." A separate article analyzes France's "lead role" in Lebanon. In Le Journal du Dimanche Gilles Delafon itemizes the three challenges facing the UNIFIL: protecting the integrity of Lebanon's borders; Lebanon's reconstruction and disarming Hezbollah, "which is in the hands of the Lebanese army." For Le Figaro, "the mission remains explosive because there is no political resolution to the crisis." (See Part C)

Weekend Le Parisien interviews FM Douste-Blazy for whom the meeting of the EU-25 FMs with UNSG Kofi Annan was a "double success for Europe and for France; the EU is going to form the backbone of the reinforced UNIFIL."

In Le Journal du Dimanche Guillemette Faure reports on President Bush's last press conference in an article entitled: "Iraq Doesn't Pay Anymore." Faure explains that "President Bush has turned pessimistic on Iraq. Defending the war is no longer a plus... With two months to go before the mid-term elections, support for the war is dwindling. Unconditional support for the war could cost the Republican party its Congressional majority."

Le Figaro reports on the "talibanization" of Pashtoun tribal regions in Pakistan. Patrick Saint Paul retraces the history of the "Taliban offensive, with the help of the U.S., to stabilize Afghanistan. But the attempt failed: the Taliban sided with Bin Laden... until the break on 9/11... Tribal Pakistani territories have since then become the new epicenter of confrontation."

Les Echos carries a syndicated column by Harvard University professor and former lead economist at the IMF Kenneth Rogoff who contends that "America should not be held responsible for the failure of the Doha Round... The U.S. is one of the world's most open importers from all countries... The day America decides to limit its importations, the world's hypocrisy about the failure of the negotiations will come to light."

As hurricane Ernesto nears the coast of Florida, all media outlets recall that this is the one year anniversary of Katrina. TF1 focused on the 20,000 people who were sheltered in the Super Dome for five days. FR2 noted that the situation remains tragic today in New Orleans and concluded that a year after Katrina, the American population still accuses Bush for being careless. An editorial in regional Les Dernieres Nouvelles d'Alsace proclaims that there is a "before and after Katrina" like there is a "before and after 9/11." (See Part C)

In Le Monde's Sunday-Monday edition, Jean-Michel Normand analyses the peculiarities of the blog phenomenon in France, where 12% or about 3.2 million Internet users have created their own blogs. Even Internauts without their own blogsites like to visit them: 36% of French visit blogs compared to 24% of British, 18% of Italians, and 9% of Germans. Normand compares blogs to on-line "cafes" for a people "inclined to put their souls on display," especially true of 12-24 year olds, who make up half of the bloggers. These sites allow people to bypass certain blockages in the society, for example, political blogs allowing young people to enter into contact with politicians who rarely have contact with those under 35. In a country where individuals are not represented by influential consumer organizations, bloggers democratize marketing, sharing their experiences about athletic shoes, digital cameras or mobile phone networks. Blogs are also a new form of sociability, in a country where there are increasing numbers of apartment-wide parties and neighborhood dinners.

Le Figaro Economie devotes one-page to the French Press and its doldrums and reports on a study by the think tank, Institut Moutaigne, which proposes a "Marshall plan," which would include government subsidies during a set time period to induce the written press to implement structural changes. A separate article reports on Liberation's downward spiral.

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Iran

"The President's Double Game"

Delphine Minoui in right-of-center Le Figaro (08/28): "Ahmadinejad's remarks about his country's right to produce nuclear energy are a clear provocation against the West... But at the same time he has adopted a more moderate tone vis-à-vis Israel. This is not the first time Iran's President blows hot and cold. An attitude which makes it even more difficult for diplomats and experts to decipher his contradictory signals... And because Iran flirts openly with terrorist groups, Iran continues to be a source of concern... One thing is certain, Iran will milk the present international situation for all it is worth in order to play a major role on the international scene... And Iran knows that America's mired situation in Iraq and Afghanistan make it difficult to launch a military operation on Iran..."

Lebanon - UNIFIL - Israel's War Against Hezbollah

"UNIFIL's Traps"

Thierry Oberle in right-of-center Le Figaro (08/28): "Clarifying the rules of engagement has not eliminated the risks for the soldiers of the UNIFIL. Despite the guarantees France was able to get, the mission can still turn into a nightmare... The main danger resides in the presence of Hezbollah fighters in the UNIFIL zone of deployment. This is all the more critical because Iran and Syria, whose regimes do not appreciate the presence of the international force, are also those who are arming Hezbollah... If the force hopes to be successful, it needs, at least tacitly, the green light from Damascus and Tehran... Complicating the already volatile climate, is the complicated and hostile past between Syria and France."

"A Historic Opportunity to Win the War Against Hezbollah Wasted by Israel"

Renaud Girard in right-of-center Le Figaro (08/28): "Why did Israel rush into the war against Hezbollah? Politically, Israel should have made use of the time it had to 'sell its cause' to opinions around the world. It would not have been difficult for the Israelis to explain the 'intolerable' situation of the military attacks by Hezbollah from a neighboring nation... The choice Israel made of favoring air strikes turned out to be a disaster... Contrary to a largely held belief, Israel cannot satisfy itself with its de facto military alliance with America. Israel needs good relations with Europe, its primary trade partner... From beginning to end, the way Israel led its war was dictated by media imperatives, obfuscating the need for a cold-headed analysis of the enemy's strong points... All in all it was an ill-prepared war. But because Israel is a democracy, voices are speaking up, namely those of the reservists."

"Israeli Doubt"

Favilla in right-of-center Les Echos (08/28): "How is one to explain

Israel's military failure when Israel's army was considered the nation's strongest asset? Besides the political reasons raised by some, we must also consider two other causes. First: the safety wall being built by Israel has induced a false feeling of safety... But most of all, a grave error may have been made by not clearly distinguishing between Hezbollah and other threats. There is a difference between the Palestinians' multi-form movement, which is open to democracy, and the more monolithic Hezbollah, of Iranian obedience, which is more difficult to infiltrate and to fight... Former Minister Shlomo Ben Ami has suggested that Israel negotiate peace with Hamas, and prepare for a vital confrontation with Hezbollah. Such a strategic inflexion could possibly erase the serious doubts weighing in on Israel."

Katrina - One Year Later

"Of Climate and Consciences"

Olivier Picard in regional Les Dernieres Nouvelles d'Alsace (08/27):
"There is a before and after Katrina, like there is a before and after 9/11. The disorganization that ensued in New Orleans after Katrina has remained imprinted on people's minds. The tragedy is still inexplicable for a great developed nation and stands as a major sign of failure and of humiliation in the eyes of the world. President Bush's fall in the polls dates back to those crucial days. In the end, Katrina weakened the U.S. President more than the fallen GIs in Iraq because the hurricane emphasized the President's inability to comprehend the challenges of our times... He has never shown concern for the changes in climate or the needs to avert them: he has not signed the Kyoto protocol... One year later, New Orleans is still showing the stigmata which are like so many warnings from above, inviting the great nations of the world to meditate on their weakness in the face of climatic dangers." HOFMANN